

# ANALYZING POETRY

Since poems are typically more condensed works, they are quite suited to line-by-line discussion of their meaning. A poetry analysis is a written response to the meaning a poet has created in a poem and a credible interpretation of the methods used to convey the meaning. Thus, the following suggestions are intended as an aid in the **reading** and **exploration** of poems; it is not intended as a rigid listing of elements to be included in an analysis. Use the suggestions as a guide to questions worth asking when you read and critically think about poetry. In writing an analytical essay, the judgment of the reader will be reflected in the choice of the elements considered important to the interpretation of the poem's meaning.

Structurally, the essay should open with the name of the work and the author, a **brief** summary of the work and the dramatic situation, and the central idea the essay will explore. The body of the essay should expand on the central theme, using a line-by-line analysis supported by quotations and examples of tools and strategies used by the poet. Several readings of the poem are recommended to ensure understanding of the poem's message and the methods used to convey it.

## I. Determine the dramatic situation

- Who is the speaker? To whom is the speaker talking?
- What is the situation/setting in the poem? When does the poem take place?

## II. Determine what is said

- Paraphrase the poem.
- Summarize the poem in one sentence.
- On the basis of the paraphrase and the summary, identify the theme of the poem.

## III. Determine the tone of the poem (*reading the poem aloud may help identify the tone*)

- Point out words that set the tone.
- How is the speaker feeling?
- What is the mood, atmosphere, or attitude of the poem?
- Determine whether the tone changes within in the poem.

## IV. Note the diction and syntax of the poem (*the choice and arrangement of words*)

- Are the words concrete or abstract? Formal or informal?
- Are there figures of speech? Are there any recurring symbols or images?
- Are there any words that seem not to fit with the rest of the poem?

## V. Determine the technical devices (*tools, such as rhythm, rhyme and figurative language, used to convey meaning*)

- Are certain sounds, words or phrases repeated?
- What is the length of the poem's stanzas (a group of lines that forms a section of a poem)?
- What is the basic metrical foot? The line length?
- What is the rhyme scheme?
- Does the author employ any other metrical devices?

## VI. Determine the values of the poem

- Does the poet succeed in recreating the speaker's experience for the reader? How?
- Is the experience intensely conveyed?
- How is the poem meaningful to the reader? Does the poem have social significance? Does the poem show the influence of other writers or shed light on the poet's life or views?